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ABSTRACT

Because school program quality depends so much on staff quality, administrators in the Weld County (Colorado) School District play a large role in staff selection and evaluation. Applicants for certified staff positions are screened by the superintendent and interviewed by the district office before a final selection of five candidates is interviewed by the principals. The qualities sought in certified employees include adequate academic preparation, intelligence, teaching and other work experience, and a sense of community involvement. The hiring of classified staff members is also important, since they often represent the school to the students and the community. Evaluation of certified employees is chiefly the responsibility of the principals, although the superintendent also observes and talks with each teacher. The district's teacher evaluation criteria stress personal and professional qualities and teaching performance. Classified employees are evaluated by their supervisors based on a system of careful job descriptions and pay incentives. (RW)

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SUBJECT: GROUP PRESENTATION ON SELECTING AND EVALUATING OF STAFF IN SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONVENTION
FEBRUARY 13 - 16, 1981
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

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REMARKS BY JACK C. HALE
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Introductory Remarks:

I appreciate the opportunity to be a presenter at the AASA Convention on the topic of selecting and evaluating staff in small school districts. When asked to be a presenter at the convention, my first impulse was to decline, using the rationale that it is too time consuming to make such a presentation, and also wondering what a superintendent from a small rural district in Colorado would have to offer to educators from throughout the United States at a national convention. However, in giving the request more consideration, I arrived at the conclusion that the sessions that were most helpful to me and from which I returned with the best ideas that could be used in my own school district back home, came from colleagues who had taken the time to share what they were doing in their local districts at national or state meetings.

Secondly, the topic is one of great interest inasmuch as my own personal feeling is that the selection of staff is one of the most important aspects of the administrative responsibility and that the staff evaluation process is also

EA 013 741

of great importance in the operation of any school district. Hopefully by sharing with you what we are doing in our district in regard to staff selection and staff evaluation, you will be able to go home with at least one idea that might possibly be helpful. Also through dialogue with other panel members and participation from the audience, you will also be in a position to provide and take home any ideas that might be helpful to your administrative team and local district. If this happens, the experience will be well worthwhile.

The Windsor School District

In order to give you a better perspective regarding staff selection and evaluation, I would like to share with you some of the background on our local school district. The Windsor School District is a small district encompassing 100 square miles with a student population of 1500 located 60 miles north of Denver, Colorado, in one of the most productive agricultural areas of our region. We have a high school 9 - 12, middle school grades 6 - 8, intermediate school grades 3 - 5, and primary school grades K-2.

[OVERHEAD - DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART]

When I became superintendent of the Windsor School District in 1973, the district was just beginning to experience the growth resulting from large industries moving into our area

and to experience the challenge of hiring additional personnel, the construction of additional facilities, and the revamping of our curriculum K-12. To meet the needs of a changing community from an agricultural base to an agricultural-industrial economic base, the school system has grown instructionally and in plant size since 1973. The district has experienced the construction of a new four-year high school, a new elementary school, and we are currently involved in a building program for another elementary school and an addition on the new high school.

The personnel system at the time I came into the district consisted of one manilla folder of applications, and there was no written evaluation process for employees in the district. The district was going through substantial change. One of my top priorities was to develop a sound personnel system and implement an effective personnel evaluation system. This was emphasized by the Board on my employment since it had been the major problem that led to a change in administration in the district.

We are fortunate to be located in a good educational environment inasmuch as Colorado State University at Fort Collins, the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley, the University of Colorado at Boulder, and Aims Community College and Vocational School are within a 50 mile radius of our community. We are also blessed with major industries in the area. Eastman Kodak, Colorado Division, has been located

within the school district since 1968 and the Hewlett Packard Company has two industrial sites,both within 15 miles of Windsor. Therefore, although we are a relatively small district enrollment wise, the economic base and support for the school district is sound and the community is very supportive of education and willing to support quality educational programs in our district.

Staff Selection

I would first like to discuss with you the staff selection process as it works in our school district. After twenty-five years in education I am convinced that the quality of any school district and school district's program is closely related to the quality of staff that delivers its programs. The administrative leadership of the superintendent in staff selection involving princpals, teaching personnel, and classified personnel demands a great amount of time of the central district administrative team. In the case of a medium-sized school district such as the one at which I am currently chief administrator, staff selection is a top priority on the list of administrative tasks. If mistakes are made in the selection process, the resulting time necessitated either in supervision or procedure for dismissal and possible litigation resulting from such dismissal, is much more time consuming than a sound personnel process to enable capable personnel to be selected initially.

Therefore, it is not hard to me to justify the time spent on personnel section.

In a small or medium-sized school district, the superintendent must be personally involved in the selection of staff. There are many other administrative tasks that should be delegated to other personnel that might be available at the central office level, to enable the superintendent to have the time to become involved in the process of screening and interviewing prospective staff members. I realize that the personnel process can take many hours. Application review, screening of applications, etc. and interviewing are time-consuming commitments. However, the final result from an all-out effort by the administrative team in the staff selection area will result in the hiring of better personnel.

Certified Staff Selection

In our district we take applications from any interested prospective teachers beginning January 1 of each year through the end of May. From May 1 until the beginning of school in the fall, we take applications only for those positions for which we have vacancies. As vacancies occur, we advise the placement agencies throughout the Rocky Mountain Region and selected colleges throughout the United States. This results in a large number of applications to be processed and screened. Applications are screened for the vacancies available, and interviews are arranged with interested candidates

who we feel are best qualified for the vacancies we have in the district.

[OVERHEAD - DISTRICT INTERVIEW FORM]

The initial screening for vacancies will be done by the superintendent and the preliminary interviewing is done at the district office level. Following initial interviewing and screening at the district level, a minimum of at least 5 of the top applicants are scheduled for interviews with the principal where we have a specific vacancy in the district. It is my strong conviction that the final decision on the applicant that will be offered the job should be based on a recommendation of the building principal. The principal is in the best position to know his building needs, the personality of his school and staff and therefore, should have the final decision-making authority in regard to the personnel he currently needs in his building. Many of our teachers hired are referred to us by staff members or personnel we know from other districts. As superintendent I see my role as:

1. Making sure we have qualified applicants available in the district.
2. Screening the applicants for interviews.
3. To interview and do preliminary selection of applicants.
4. To make applicants available to the building principals for final interviewing.

Of course, it is best if the building principal and superintendent agree on the person that we feel should be offered the job. Principals also have the privilege of going through the files and inviting anyone for interviews that may have been overlooked by the superintendent in the preliminary screening.

Although time-consuming for our staff because of the large number of applications received in our district for what sometimes may be a small number of vacancies, I still feel strongly that the process is worthwhile and one we will continue. We received approximately 425 applications last year and hired 14 new teachers and 1 new assistant principal. We still feel in our district that we want to give personal attention to each applicant based on the type of specific qualifications that we feel are necessary for teachers in our schools. We will continue this process as long as we can manage to screen the candidates through personal attention of the superintendent. This is not in anyway a put down of certain perceived models that have been developed throughout the country for screening.

(ex. SRI Selection Research, Inc., Perceiver Interview Process out of Lincoln, Nebraska)

In recruiting teaching personnel, the following are some of the qualities we are looking for in hiring teachers:

I. - a. Well prepared academically in their field.

b. Evidence of previous successful teaching (student teaching).

c. Who can command respect and discipline in the classroom.

II. - a. Bright, articulate individuals.

b. Able to express themselves and communicate effectively.

c. Relate well with others - a people kind of person.

d. Enthusiasm about what they are doing - (There is no substitute for this quality.)

III. - Evidence of the ability to develop and implement teaching strategies effectively in a classroom situation and to continually improve and strengthen this area.

IV. - a. Knowledgeable about the world of work and equipped to work effectively within our district's philosophy of Education for Life and the infusion of career education into their curriculum areas.

b. Business/industrial experience.

V. - Posess a strong sense of community and community involvement.

The Windsor School District has the distinction in Colorado as being considered an excellent school district, and I attribute much of this success to a high quality teaching staff committed to the teaching process and kids. I want to again emphasize the tie that I feel exists between the quality of the teaching staff and the excellence in a school system. This is not

to discount other factors in a community that have influence on the quality of a school system, but the securing of quality teachers is at the top of our list.

Classified Staff Selection

I do not want to overlook the importance of securing of classified personnel in relationship to the excellence of any school system. Although classified personnel are not often involved in classroom instruction directly, they are often directly involved with students. They have a tremendous impact on the way that the school district is perceived in the community and their value is critical to any school district. Therefore, the task of the selection of classified personnel should not be taken for granted, and every effort should be made to employ personnel committed to the school district and to their specific tasks. In our school district this has become more difficult as a result of new industries moving into our community. The school district is now having to compete salary-wise for employees. This makes it more difficult to secure the quality of employees that choose to work in a school district at a lower wage scale than might be available through industry. It is important for public schools to secure people who enjoy working in the school environment rather than in an industrial setting, who will complete their tasks in such a manner that shows pride in our schools and affects good relationships with the community. To achieve this feeling,

classified staff must be treated with dignity and we must show appreciation for their efforts the same as we show for teaching or certified staff. Too often classified employees work in an environment where they may consider themselves second-class citizens. We must make every effort to overcome this stigma if we are to keep our schools functioning smoothly.

Summary Statement - Staff Selection Process

The message is simple -- hire high-quality administrators, teachers, and classified staff and your chances are excellent that you will have a quality school system. At least this has proven to be true in the Windsor School District.

Evaluation

The evaluation process for both certified and classified staff is vital to any school district. It is our belief in the Windsor School District that the evaluation process for all employees should be an on-going process for dialogue and understanding between administrators, supervisors, and employees. The teacher evaluation system in our district is viewed as a program for promoting professional efficiency. It is the philosophy of our school district that the evaluation is a reflection of professional standards and improvement and at the same time is a rating of teacher efficiency. Many educators, when discussing teacher evaluation, will emphasize the importance of encouraging a process of professional growth and we certainly

concur in this. However, we must also recognize that it is necessary to rate teacher efficiency as we consider reemployment and the tenure laws as they exist in most states. Viewing teacher evaluation in this dual role is more difficult but one with which we must work to the best of our abilities. Therefore, it is important that there be a full understanding of the evaluation process in the district if we are to be successful in our efforts.

In our district the building principal is responsible for the evaluation of personnel under his supervision. Teaching personnel in Colorado are on a three-year probationary period before achieving tenure status. It is imperative that a process be implemented that evaluates competent teaching and the commitment of the teachers to the teaching process prior to the awarding of tenure. Once a teacher goes on tenure in our state, it is not impossible, but extremely difficult to dismiss that teacher. I emphasize with my principals the importance of the instructional aspects of their job, and we expect at least 50 per cent of their time to be spent on instructional matters. They are to evaluate each probationary teacher at least 3 times each year, and based on ongoing observations, follow this up with a conference. Tenure personnel are to be evaluated at least once each year. The principals understand that they are to assist their teachers in any way that they can to help them in their teaching skills, but at the same time realize that they have to make a recommendation back

to the district office in regard to reemployment annually during the probationary period.

As superintendent, I make sure that I visit every teacher at least once in the year in a teaching situation, and all probationary teachers at least twice each year. If requested by a building principal, additional visits will be scheduled. In a school building with an assistant principal, one of their responsibilities would be to assist the principal in the evaluation process. If an assistant principal is assigned to one of our schools, the team approach is used in evaluating at the building level with the building principal still having primary responsibility for working with the individual teachers.

In regard to the teacher evaluation, I cannot over-emphasize the importance of the evaluation skills of the principal in the school in making this process work. I firmly believe it is the most difficult job in administration and a task that many building principals tend to shy away from because of its difficulty and therefore results in a poor job in the evaluation process. This is not fair to the district nor to the individual teachers. The principal is the key in making this evaluation process work, and if the principal is not able to face up to this difficult task, then we need to look for a change in personnel. Our principals understand this will be one of their important tasks and continually strive to improve their skills in evaluation. Some principals effectively use the video tape recorder in assisting them in working with the staff in improving teaching

skills through classroom observation. I encourage the use of the video tape. It is one of the best tools that we have available for working with staff in the improvement of instruction. It takes some time and skill to implement a system where the staff feels comfortable with the use of the video tape equipment, but it will pay many dividends as we work to strengthen the teaching process.

As a principal I personally liked the interaction analysis model as another dimension that can be used in the teacher evaluation process. Other techniques and procedures will work equally as well, and I do not have time to go into the specifics of the techniques that the principals might use in the evaluation process. However, we do look closely at the time on task during observations. I mainly want to emphasize that the school district, regardless of size, should have an organized process for teacher evaluation.

We, as chief administrators in our districts, should have an effective teacher evaluation system high on our list of priorities.

I have several copies of the instrument used in our district and these are available if anyone is interested in picking them up at the close of the presentation. Again, the instrument is not a key to a good evaluation process. It is still the personnel involved that makes the system a good process. We feel that this evaluation process in our district is working very well for us. We look at several major areas in our district

teacher evaluation process:

[OVERHEAD - DISTRICT EVALUATION INSTRUMENT]

1. Professional Qualities
   a. Evidences knowledge of subject matter
   b. Understanding of child growth and development
   c. Professional ethics
   d. Professional cooperation
   e. Creativity and resourcefulness
   f. Support of school program
2. Performance in the Teaching-Learning Process
   a. Utilizes effective teaching methods and techniques
   b. Manages the classroom; has control, but encourages formation of student self-discipline
   c. Diagnosing and prescribing for the strengths and weaknesses of students.
   d. Motivates students and encourages self-discovery.
   e. Uses informal as well as formal means of evaluating students.
   f. Creates a favorable climate for students to express themselves.
   g. Interacts with each student, encourages student-to-student interaction.

3. Personal Qualities

   a. Exhibits a personal appearance acceptable to students, school and community

   b. Demonstrates punctuality and consistency of responsibilities

   c. Reflects emotional maturity

   d. Demonstrates good relationships and rapport

   e. Projects a good image

The strength of the instrument lies in the summary of strengths, the areas of needed improvement, and the goals established for professional improvement. It is in this area that we get the desired interaction between supervisor and teacher. The goal setting that is necessary for improvement is an important part of the process, and it would stand alone if the district so elected to use it in that way without the checklist. The teaching personnel have had an opportunity for input into the development of the instrument and the process. To help new teachers in the district, we have also developed examples of some teacher performance behaviors that we are looking for and address in the teacher evaluation instrument. I also have handouts of some of these examples that we give out with the teacher evaluations and these will also be available after the presentations are over. We have found that these performance objectives assist us in working with new staff in the district who are not used to the evaluation process in their former employment.

We firmly believe in continuity in visitations. Our principals will be in every classroom of probationary personnel as often as possible. The teachers are used to seeing the principals in their classrooms and expect follow-up conferences. It is not unusual for them to see the superintendent in their classrooms, and they do not feel that something is wrong because the superintendent is visiting or that the principal makes several follow-up visits. I also have an individual conference with every staff member in the district at least once each year and the staff has a chance to complete a needs assessment instrument to provide feedback to the administration on how they feel about the district and administrative leadership. It is still a difficult and demanding area, but we feel we are making progress and if you have questions concerning evaluation in our district, or in a school district with limited personnel, I would be happy to respond to any questions you might have during the period of time that we have set aside for participation from the audience.

Evaluation - Classified Personnel

We have also added an evaluation system for our non-certified or classified personnel in the district, and at the present time this system is not as refined as our teacher evaluation system. We feel we are making progress. Some of our classified personnel are under an incentive wage system that necessitated the establishing of a job description.

The office personnel, maintenance, and teacher aides are currently under an incentive system with added wage increases based on job performance. It is in these areas that we have best refined our evaluation process. It has been our experience that the classified employees welcome the opportunity to be evaluated by their immediate supervisor and to have an opportunity for dialogue around their job performance and have accepted very well the establishing of the evaluation process. When the system was first established, some of the classified personnel were very uptight with the formal evaluation, but now feel it very helpful to them in performing their job and in improving their job performance.

Again often times we often overlook the non-teaching personnel in this area, and we feel it is important to put in place a good evaluation system for classified personnel.

I have some examples of the evaluation instrument currently being used with our office personnel, if anyone is interested in receiving a copy.

[OVERHEAD - EVALUATION INSTRUMENT - OFFICE PERSONNEL]

In closing, I again want to emphasize that a school district is only as good as its employees. It is important that we hire quality people and it is no different than if we were operating a business or industry in this regard. People make things work and in education we must continue to hire top

people in the education field if we are to maintain high quality educational standards and not lose these quality people to business and industry. I realize this is becoming more difficult with the limits on resources that many school districts are finding, but we must work with our respective communities to show the importance of adequate financing to attract the top graduates from our colleges and universities or from our business or non-teaching areas. We also must find ways to better evaluate our personnel. This will help to improve our staff, and, at the same time eliminate those who have no business in such an important task as the education of our children.